



Seattle's Comprehensive Plan Update

ISSUE PAPER #6: Mode Split Targets for Urban Centers

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan includes a set of mode split goals in its Transportation Element. These goals aim to increase the use of alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle by Seattle residents. Inclusion of mode split goals satisfies Countywide Growth Management Policies that local jurisdictions establish mode split goals for employment Centers. Nevertheless, there are problems with the mode split goals as currently established by the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically:

- The city did not meet its 2000 mode split goals.
- The current citywide mode split goals tell us little about mode split in urban centers and villages where future growth and transportation alternatives are concentrated. This means that their usefulness in targeting transportation investments and in managing transportation services for growth is limited.
- The mode split goals do not provide information on how Seattle's transportation system is used by commuters who work in Seattle but live outside the city.

The Comprehensive Plan Update provides an opportunity to evaluate not just our progress toward reaching mode split goals, but to consider how mode split goals can be used most effectively in making investment in transportation services and facilities over the life of the Comprehensive Plan. Below is a discussion providing background, considerations for revision, and a recommended approach to setting mode split goals.

Background

"Mode split" refers to the choices people make between available transportation modes. Seattle's transportation system consists of single-occupant vehicles, car pools, and public transportation, use of bicycles or walking, and working at home. Each of these methods of travel is a "mode". Through the urban village strategy, Comprehensive Plan policies encourage development of land use patterns and transportation systems that reduce use of single-occupant vehicles. The mode split goals in the comprehensive Plan quantify reducing the number of people who travel to work using single occupancy vehicles and instead use alternative transportation modes. The U.S. Census Data for the year 2000 shows that, in spite of making progress, Seattle fell short of its citywide mode split goals. The

table below shows both the Comprehensive Plan mode split goals for 2000 and 2010 and the actual mode split for the years 1990 and 2000.

MODE CHOICE	1990 ACTUAL	2000 ACTUAL	2000 GOAL	2010 GOAL
Single Occupant Vehicle	59%	56%	51%	35%
Non Single-Occupant Vehicle				
Carpool	12%	11%	12%	13%
Public Transportation	16%	18%	20%	27%
Bicycle and other	3%	3%	5%	9%
Walk	7%	7%	8%	10%
Work at Home	3%	5%	4%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

A focus on citywide trends tells us that while we have fallen short of our goals, we have made some progress. However, this citywide focus may be obscuring much more pronounced trends for the City's Urban Centers. The Comprehensive Plan directs growth to those neighborhoods (urban villages) where adequate services can be provided effectively and efficiently. This means, among other things, that there are more alternatives to single occupancy vehicles in these locations than in the city overall. Further, the Urban Village Strategy should also result in greater numbers of people living close to where they work. For example, mode split data from the 2000 census for the downtown urban villages looks very different than the same data viewed on a citywide basis.

MODE CHOICE IN THE YEAR 2000	DOWNTOWN	UPTOWN/ QUEEN ANN	CAPITOL HILL/FIRST HILL	UNIVERSITY DISTRICT	NORTHGATE	2000 CITYWIDE
Single Occupant Vehicle	28%	41%	31%	30%	50%	56%
Non Single-Occupant Vehicle	72%	59%	69%	70%	50%	44%
Carpool	5%	8%	7%	6%	15%	11%
Public Transportation	23%	28%	26%	23%	23%	18%
Bicycle and other	3%	4%	3%	2%	0	3%
Walk	36%	16%	29%	35%	9%	7%
Work at Home	5%	3%	4%	4%	3%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

What is notable in these numbers is the much lower reliance on single occupancy vehicles for trips to work made by Urban Center residents than by residents of the city overall. These residents rely on public transportation and

walking to much greater extent than the city, overall. This would be expected as Urban Centers where people can live closer to where they work as well as areas where transit services are concentrated. Viewing mode split goals within the overall context of the Comprehensive Plan means we should expect these differences in the use of transportation alternatives between Urban Centers/Villages and areas outside of Urban Centers/Villages. Citywide goals, alone, may not be the most effective measure of how our travel behavior is changing.

How Can We Improve Mode Split Goals?

Issues for consideration in revising the Comprehensive Plan's mode split goals include defining the appropriate geography to measure mode split, deciding which journey to work choices to count, and what are reasonable mode split goals.

- **Geography.** The Urban Village strategy directs job growth to Urban Centers and Hub Urban Villages. Between 1991 and 2001 almost 70% of Seattle's job growth occurred in Urban Centers (including manufacturing/Industrial Centers). City policy is to support these centers, in part, through provision of adequate transportation resources to accommodate anticipated growth. It is in these locations that alternatives to Single-Occupant Vehicles are of particular importance. While a general reduction in use of single-occupancy vehicles citywide is beneficial, mode split goals that give information about the transportation system serving Urban Centers/Hub Urban Villages may be more useful. By establishing goals and tracking mode split for these employment centers, the city will be able to target programs and physical improvements and more effectively advocate for regional transportation resources.
- **Where workers work or where workers live?** Measurements of mode split focus on journey to work choices. Currently, Comprehensive Plan mode split goals are for journey to work choices made by Seattle residents. As a regional employment center, many users of Seattle's transportation system work in the city but do not live here. Journey to work choices of non-Seattle residents that commute to Seattle to work have a significant impact on Seattle's transportation system.
- **What are reasonable mode split goals?** Seattle has made some progress toward its mode split goals. Should mode split goals be adjusted to more accurately capture reasonable expectations? Do citywide goals miss real progress in Urban Centers and Urban Villages where a transit services are concentrated thus making feasible the greater use of transportation alternatives?

Options

The following options offer approaches to addressing mode split. These options may be used in combination, as appropriate, to meet the intent of establishing mode split goals in the comprehensive Plan.

- 1. Make no changes to the Comprehensive Plan mode split goals other than adding goals for the year 2020 to reflect the 2024 horizon year of the Comprehensive Plan.**

Maintaining mode split goals on a citywide basis would provide useful benchmarks to measure our progress towards encouraging alternatives to single occupancy vehicles.

- 2. Adjust existing citywide goals to reflect more realistic changes in travel pattern**

This option would maintain citywide focus of mode split goals but establish more realistic expectations for mode split. Less ambitious citywide goals may better reflect a greater reliance on single occupancy vehicles outside urban centers/villages.

- 3. Develop mode split goals that focus on Urban Centers and Hub Urban Villages.**

This option provides greater alignment of Comprehensive Plan land use and transportation policies. The Urban Village growth strategy aims to reduce less reliance on single-occupancy vehicles in growth centers. Establishing mode split goals for these areas allows the effectiveness of this strategy to be evaluated and provides useful information to use when advocating for greater transit services. This approach also recognizes that areas of the city have different travel characteristics and different levels of access to transit service. For instance more ambitious mode split targets are appropriate for downtown than for other areas of the city because it has more bus connections than any other place in the region, and will also be served by light rail and the monorail.

- 4. Include in the measurement of mode split choices mode split by place of employment and by place of residence.**

This approach would capture all users of the transportation system – those who live in Seattle and commute to work in Seattle, live in Seattle

and work outside Seattle, and those who live outside Seattle, but use Seattle's transportation system to commute to jobs in Seattle.